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" O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee to-night!

" For Christ is born of Mary;
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars! together
Proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the King,
And peace to men on earth!

" How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heav'n.
No ear may hear His coming;
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still,
The dear Christ enters in.

" O holy child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in,
Be born in us to-day!
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell,—
Oh, come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel."

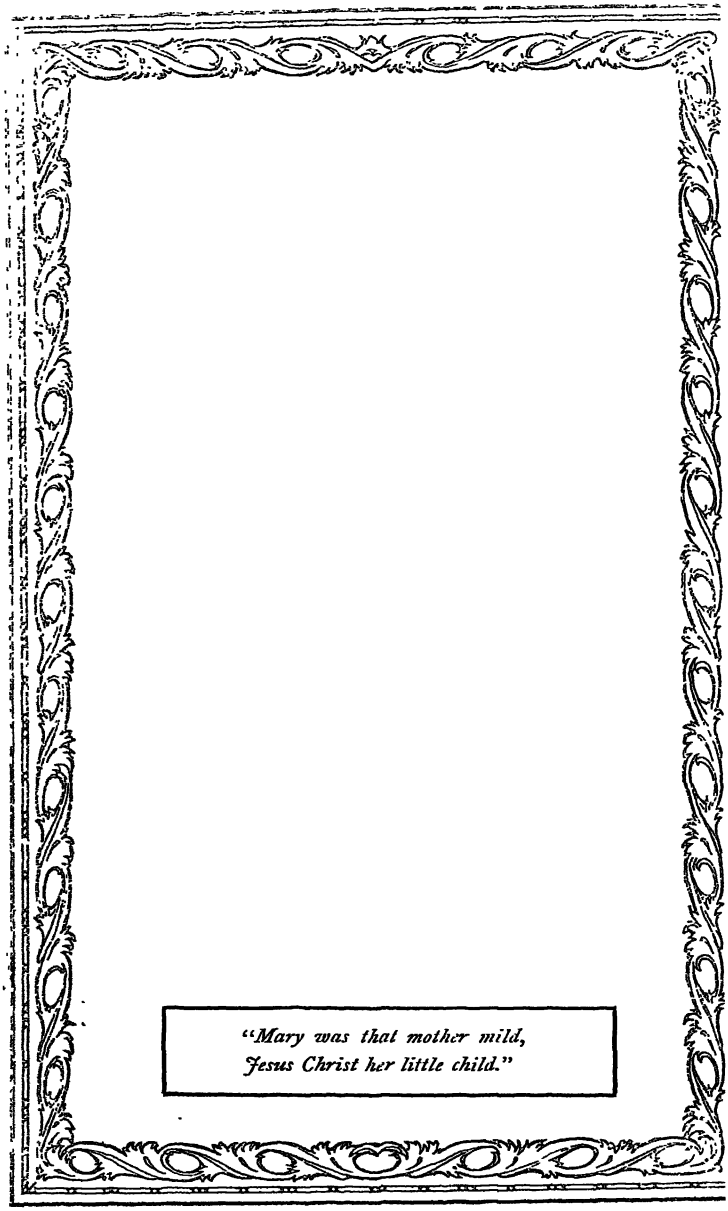
—*Phillips Brooks.*

Contents

I.	Mary the Virgin	9
II.	Gabriel the Messenger . .	18
III.	Elizabeth the Kinswoman . .	31
IV.	Joseph the Friend . . .	37
V.	Bethlehem the Birthplace . .	43
VI.	Jesus the Babe Born . . .	48
VII.	"Unto Us," the New Heir . .	53

Scripture text of the story:—Matthew i. 18–ii. 12. Luke i. 26–56–ii. 1–20.

A Quiet Talk About The Babe of Bethlehem



"Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child."

A Quiet Talk About The Babe of Bethlehem

By

S. D. GORDON

Author of "Quiet Talks on Power," "Quiet Talks on Prayer," "Quiet Talks on Following the Christ"



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I

MARY THE VIRGIN

SHE was a simple-hearted maiden with the light of the morning in her pure face. Straightforwardness and sincerity were in her very pose, and in the look of her clear eye.

She moved with a swift deft noiselessness, and yet there was a lingering, almost like a caress, in touch and speech and pose that seemed to tell much of her inner nature.

It was more than thoughtfulness. It was as if she saw *through* the common things she touched, saw the *spirit* of which they are the material expression.

She went the common daily round of simple homely duties. But she saw visions and dreamed dreams, as she faithfully did her appointed tasks.

There was the unconscious innocent artlessness of a child in face and speech and move. Yet if some principle of right came into question there at once came to the fore a will that was anything but childlike in its strength and maturity.

Then the flash of eye and set of face and tenseness of body, and withal a greater quietness of word and manner, revealed the will of iron or better of wrought steel. And crossing Napoleon's Alps were an easy task compared with attempting a crossing here. Whoever tried never got beyond the trying stage.

She insisted on following every glint and gleam of light that came, however small it might be; and that, too, utterly regardless of difficulties. This was the real touchstone of her character. That is a narrow steep path. It leads out in front of every one's feet. It is a lonely path, oft untrodden though never unseen.

She trod it, trod it faithfully, every step of it that opened out in front of a step already

trodden. This was the touchstone of her spirit, as of every true life.

So she kept her life pure inward, warm and simple outward, and open upward. Yet withal the chief impression she gave was of a simple-hearted maiden, with light step, intent on her task.

This much we learn in Holy Writ of her who was chosen by God to bring to the birth, and to mother the growing human years of His Only-Begotten.

If you see an apple you know there is an apple tree that bore this bit of fruit. The apple is the fruit of the tree. All of the tree, from unseen root to outmost tip of bough, is in the apple.

So character reveals itself in the outer expression. Face and voice, action and pose, are the fruit of the inner life. We all recognize some of the fruit. None of us are very expert in recognizing the finer fruits. But they are all there for eyes that may be able to see.

Her family was one of the oldest in the

nation, and one of the most highly honored. For she belonged to the royal line of the great King David. The family records were all sacredly treasured.

But the sore straits of the nation, so sadly commonplace, had affected her family in many ways. In the drift back and forth under the drive of necessity, the unceasing thought for bed and bread and garb, her branch of the family had swung far from the old ancestral territory.

It was in little Nazareth of the north that she had grown to young womanhood. Nestled on three sides of a gentle depression on the hills it yet had a wondrous outlook.

The town crept up the hill as though eager for the best, whatever neighbors might say. It looked out over that great plain that breaks across the hills that run from north and south. Esdraelon seems to elude the vigilance of the lonely Carmel ridge doing sentinel duty by the sea, as though inviting all men to a truce upon a common level.

From the top of the hill just above the town one could look out over the great stretched out broken plain. Yonder thin moving line is a caravan of traders, probably from Syria or far Babylonia bound for Egypt.

Over there that is a group of imperial Roman soldiers galloping along in their reckless aggressiveness, masters of the world. And over yonder that yet thinner, less distinct line is probably some faithful Hebrew pilgrims coming from some far exiled colony to one of the feasts at the holy shrine of Jerusalem.

Over on the left lie the hills that rise up toward the historic fortress city of David. In front beyond the broad broken plain lies the great blue sea. That sea is the whole outer world. It is indeed the Mediterranean, the Center-of-the-earth, Sea. All lands and peoples and tongues and warfares and cultures slope down somewhere to its shores.

And up here to the right lies hoary Her-

mon in its grandeur, crown of all the northern mountains. And at the back you can see the land sloping down to the yellow-brown, twisting, watery barrier called the Jordan, and beyond that the hills rising again toward the sunrising.

This was one of the two books in Mary's scant home library. The world opened its pages wide at Nazareth.

I have no doubt that many a twilight found her climbing the hill, perhaps with some bit of needlework in hand, to sit and sew, and look out, and dream dreams and see visions.

For she had learned to read—a little, spirit reading. And she had that gift, that is given to simple, thoughtful hearts, of seeing *through things* out and in to the real unseen that makes and moulds the seen.

The other book she had was the Word of God. Two wondrous books those, the Word of God and the World of God. The first opens the eyes for the only clear full look at

the second. The only clue to the world of God is the Word of God.

Without that it is a hopeless tangle, an enigma without an answer. But with the clue-book at hand all clears. At least it clears enough to keep one from being befogged, and to hold his feet steady, and make him watchful for more light.

And Mary used this old first book. That is quite clear. I do not mean of course that she had a scholar's knowledge and grasp of the old Hebrew writings.

But she clearly did have what was within the reach of any thoughtful person busy with the daily round of common life. She knew the language—the *phraseology*—of the one Book which comprised the whole literature of her people. She had drunk deep of the *spirit* of the Book.

She knew the past of her people. She felt to the quick their national humiliation so inexpressibly deep and sore, and still holding them in its shameful bondage.

She glowed over its picture of the future. She knew Isaiah, and the others, and believed them. She took at full value all the old visions of a wondrous future with a wondrous King, and all that.

She couldn't make it fit with present conditions. She couldn't figure out how the change would come. She did not try to. Orientals don't go to figuring out processes. They leave that to the Westerner. 'Twere blessed if more of us were more Oriental in this regard.

But she believed. In her simple heart she thought and longed, she burned and glowed, she prayed and expected, really *expected.* This much is clear.

She went her daily simple round, household duties, the trips back and forth to the one village spring where all went for their water, synagogue service on the seventh day, neighborly intercourse, and so on.

But her heart was full of deeper things, of which she *knew*, she understood, *little*

but believed and hoped and yearned and brooded and expected *much.*

Her family had arranged her betrothal in accord with the customs of her people. She had come to the age when this should be done. And, no doubt, after much thought and interchange, arrangements had been begun and carried forward until the betrothal was duly arranged and celebrated with all the formality common among her people.

Her betrothed would naturally be a fellow tribesman of the same famous tribe of Judah to which her own family belonged. Things have come up to this point in her life when our story opens.

II

GABRIEL THE MESSENGER

ONE day she was sitting alone within the house busy at her task of the moment, perhaps sewing, when her quick eye noted a shadow on the floor at the street door.

Looking quickly up she sees a kindly faced man standing in the doorway, a stranger to her. He is not of the village, nor yet any of her more distant kinspeople whom she had seen. A glance tells her this.

Before she can rise hastily and offer the customary hospitalities he speaks and her quick ear notices the grave, singularly clear tones of his low, kindly voice. He utters a simple brief gracious salutation:

"Hail, thou one endued with grace. The Lord with thee."

And Mary's heart is at once all in a flutter. A great sense of fear takes hold of her. She reveals deep agitation. Who can this stranger be? And what sort of a salutation is this? And there's an undefined something about this stranger that she feels, with a sense of deepening awe. And all this is in a moment.

And at once the kindly voice goes on in quiet and quieting measured gentleness:

"Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God."

And a quieting comes over Mary's spirit, stilling her agitation as the words are spoken. And again she is half conscious that the quieting is not simply in the words but in the presence of this stranger.

And so the words that follow fall upon a quieted, and so a more attentive, a keener listening ear. And then she hears the most startling announcement of God's plan for her.

A son was to be born. The name was given by which He was to be called, Jesus.

This itself is startling to her. But it cannot compare with what follows.

This son would be great. He would be the Son of the Most High. He would revive the ancient throne of David, and reign over the renewed nation forever, and there would be no limit to His Kingdom.

Such was the startling message so quietly spoken by the stranger in the doorway. And with the words came a peculiar sense of certainty. The thing would really be so

Does Mary's thought go with lightning swiftness back to Sarah and the word spoken to her about a son? Does she think of Hannah and her promised son? She knows both incidents well. She has often brooded over them. If they do come to her now it is with that peculiar lightning swiftness of thought like a flashlight picture.

But a simple question is all that comes from her lips. Her great strength of character is revealed in the very simplicity of her response, her brief, direct question.

There is no amazement expressed, no questioning of this startling thing told to her. Only a bit of information is asked for. It was concerning the one natural thing for a woman to think about.

There was an impression of *immediateness* in the man's speech. The thing was to happen at once in its beginnings. And her marriage was probably not yet arranged as to time.

These early Orientals thought and spoke of this sort of event with a primitive simplicity which has largely been lost. And so this maiden, who had so faithfully followed all the light that has come to her, now asks for a bit of light.

What would be *the method* whereby this great event would be worked out? And at once the question is answered, the desired light is given. This is characteristic of God in His dealings with an obedient human spirit.

And the sought for light brings another

startling announcement. The result spoken of would come by God's own Holy Spirit coming in a special overshadowing way upon Mary. So there would be begotten a man child. And so He would be the very Son of God. This is the second startling announcement, aye, more than that—*stupendous.*

And at once, quietly, clearly, Mary understands just what is meant. At last the dream of her people is to come true. At last—deliverance. The old pictured glowing visions of the prophetic rolls are to become real.

The time has come. And she—*she*—has been chosen by God as the one to be used. Some one had to be when the time did come. The time was come. And God has chosen to use her for the simple, holy task.

Not as Sarah, nor as Hannah, something much more. He had given much grace. He would give more, as much as she would need. Mary's very quietness of spirit reveals both her great strength and the great grace given her.

But the heavenly visitor is still speaking. While these thoughts flash through Mary's mind with more than lightning swiftness and simplicity and clearness, she hears the further word.

This is a word to strengthen and encourage Mary in accepting readily, unquestioningly, what has just been told her. God is at work elsewhere in a wondrous way. She can see His power in action among her own people in a very unusual way.

Elizabeth her kinswoman is even then knowing the direct touch of God in *her* life, in a most unusual, most remarkable way, and *has* known it so for some time. God is at work. The time is ripe. And then comes the sentence so simple, so tremendous, that no one has yet taken it in in the fullness of its meaning: "*no word from God shall be void of power.*"

And the angel waits a moment. He waits Mary's answer. This was God's wondrous plan. It waited now, waited upon her consent. So all God's plans wait on human consent.

Every one has the privilege of saying "yes" to God some time in his life. It may not be at such a turning point in history as this. It will be as much of a turning point for the man answering. It will be the point of turning in and up to God's plan.

And one never does know how much may turn on his simple glad "yes" to God. Other turning points in history will come. Other crises draw on. There will be need of men again.

And Mary answers. The waiting is only long enough for the will to shape the lips. There is a simple assent. There could be no less, with a true heart; and there could be no more.

There is no hesitation, no questionings, no figuring out of probabilities and possibilities, no consideration of coming difficulties and embarrassments and sore misunderstandings which may likely have come swiftly to her womanly thought.

Just a quiet, strong, simple "yes"; "very

well"; "*behold the bondmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.*"

Of her own sweet glad consent, like the Hebrew bondman of old, she has become the voluntary bond-slave for life of her Lord. She yielded her strong will to His.

In this particular thing He had asked of her she had yielded herself, her all, in the most sacred sense to the use and control of God as her Lord and Master.

And already her Lord has put upon her the fresh mark of His ownership, in His choice of her for His plan, which can now be carried out.

Do you recall the old primitive custom among the Hebrews regarding slavery?[1] A man might sell himself for six years, but on the seventh new year's morning he was free.

But he might find himself saying, "I don't want to go away. I love my master; this is home to me. I want to stay for always." And he would plainly say this to his master.

[1] Exodus xxi. 2–6.

Then, you remember, the old simple custom was like this: his master would take his slave out to the front door of the home, in the presence of the chief men of the neighborhood.

And he would pierce a sharp-pointed awl through the lobe of the man's ear and into the door-jamb. The man was fastened for the moment to his master's house. So the man became his master's bond-slave forever.

It was a going into *slavery*. It was *voluntary*. It was for *love's* sake. It was for *service*. It was for *life*. It was after a six years' *testing*. It was of his very self.

This was what Mary's divine Son did years after. The Psalmist's words,—"mine ears hast thou pierced,"[1] in their connection, clearly find their fullness of meaning in Jesus.

And the Isaiah reference to the same thing reveals how much of shame and spitting and worse that volunteer slavery to His Father's will meant for Jesus.[2]

[1] Psalm xl. 6, margin.

[2] Isaiah l. 5–7.

From India, up in the five-rivered Panjab, a story comes of a young man who was persecuted because he accepted Christ. He was seized by his family and carried far off. And for long no word of him was received.

Finally a letter came to the man who had taught him and led him to accept Christ. Eagerly the letter was read for some word of his Christian faith. But not a word was there, to his Christian friend's deep disappointment.

Then his eye was caught by a queer sort of scratching in a corner of the letter. What was it? Was there something here? And the letter was held this way and that, till at last it was seen just what that insignificant looking scratching meant.

Clearly it was a man's ear. There was a hole in the lobe of the ear. And in the lobe a piece of stick was thrust. So the flood of soft light broke.

The young man had been taught about the old Hebrew custom. Here he was say-

ing, "I love my Master. I have not left His service. I am His forever."

All of this is in one word of Mary's quiet, simple answer, the word "*bondmaid*." That was her bit of etching, scratched, not in a corner, but out in full view, on the front page of the epistle of her life.

That told her glad slavery of love, free, strong, lifelong serving love, regardless of misunderstandings and embarrassments and difficulties; of possible smitings and pluckings of shame that might come to her.

And she offered the sweet slavery of herself *after* she knew the particular plan for her life. So many of us make the surrender in blank, but balk when the particulars are filled in.

Blessed indeed is Mary among women for the whole-hearted giving of herself to be used as her Lord might choose. And blessed is she, and he, who join themselves in like manner to the blessed company of Mary the Virgin.

And the quiet, kindly faced man who has been talking with Mary turns and passes quietly out of the door and out of sight.

Just so had the three men, strangers, passing by, stopped at the tent of Abraham under the great oaks of Mamre in the southern mountains that early afternoon long, long before. And all unawares of who these are Abraham offers his gracious hospitality, and then finds himself talking face-to-face with Jehovah Himself.[1]

And so God's companions on that journey, the two angels, come as two men to Lot at eventide as he sits in the gateway of wicked Sodom.[2] So Joshua sees a man standing, sword in hand, athwart his path, and then finds that it is Jehovah Himself with whom he is talking.[3]

In the same way a man comes to Manoah and his wife to tell of a son coming to them.[4] And in like manner had Gabriel himself,

[1] Genesis xviii. throughout.
[2] Genesis xix. 1–22.
[3] Joshua v. 13–vi. 2.
[4] Judges xiii. 2–21.

Mary's visitor, talked with Daniel about what should happen to his people.[1]

In just this simple natural fashion does Gabriel come to Mary, and when his errand is done, her heart is prepared and her consent gotten, he quietly walks out and is not seen again.

[1] Daniel viii. 15–16; ix. 21.

III

ELIZABETH THE KINSWOMAN

AND Mary is left alone. She glances up perhaps. Yes, quite alone. Is it a dream? Will she be awaking? Ah! no, it is too real a thing ever to be questioned. No one who ever had a message direct from God doubts it.

That was a holy day to Mary. She rises to go about her usual common task. But there's a touch of sacredness in the day.

It has been made holy to her by God's choice of her for the simple bit of service she *could* give. It had been made holy by this visit of the messenger of God.

It was made yet more holy by her own action, her simple full consent to God's plan for her life. Nothing human *can* make holy like that.

That evening in the twilight she sat on the hill looking out over plain and mountain and sea in holy wordless communion. Perhaps if she had access to an old Scripture roll in the home she turned to that Psalm of Asaph's, the Seventy-seventh.

And her slender finger traced anew the line: "*I will remember thy wonders of old.*" And she paused and mused. Then, with a holy hush coming anew over her spirit, her finger dropped down and traced the yet more wondrous line: "Thou art the God that *doest* wonders."[1]

That night she knelt by her couch in sacred renewal of her solemn dedication of herself to such a wondrous God. And she cares for her personal needs with a new sense of the sacredness of things that can be touched and cared for.

And now Mary's thought turns naturally to her kinswoman in the southland, Elizabeth. She was much Mary's senior. It is

[1] lxxvii. 11, 14.

not improbable that there was a kinship of spirit between them. On some previous visit they may have had simple fellowship and understanding in the deep things of the spirit.

Elizabeth may have been to her as a wise mother in spiritual things. And now Elizabeth was having unusual experience these days of the wonder-working power of God. *If* she might have some fellowship of spirit with Elizabeth now. There would be no one with whom she could commune of what had been told her.

No one could understand. And it was a very holy thing to her, that interview. She could tell only words. She could never tell the sense of reality and power that had come.

And one shrinks from letting out the inner sacred things to those who do not understand. If she might commune with Elizabeth. And as she thinks it over it comes strongly to her that this is the Spirit's suggestion and plan.

And so speedily the visit is arranged. And the journey south is made. And no one suspects how much this quiet young traveller knows in her own spirit of God's plan.

Just so is God ever at work, while the busy crowd hurries on its important small way utterly oblivious of the great things being done.

And now as she enters the home of Elizabeth, perhaps unannounced, the unusual salutation of Elizabeth strikes her ear. It comes as a gracious assurance that she had indeed understood aright what had come to her.

If there had been any questionings; if any wonderings had come; if indeed it could be true that one so simple as she, so unworthy, was in the plan of God so intimately; if any touch of dreamy unreality had come in; any thing of this sort is now quite removed.

And as she listens to the words from

her kinswoman's lips her whole being responds afresh to God's call. And the touch of the Holy Spirit comes anew upon her.

And she breaks out in the simple rapturous song of worship and praise. That song is Mary's spirit photograph. Her whole inner heart and life are laid bare in its simple, reverent, joyous words.

Wondrous communion that was between the two kinswomen. And for three months they have sweetest fellowship together. And Mary is immeasurably strengthened by this sweet intercourse of spirit.

And now she returns to her northern home, and picks up again the thread of her daily task. And none know of her sacred secret. And evermore that lingering brooding mood grows upon her as she goes about the home and village on her common round.

Do questionings arise in her mind to harass and tease as the days go on? If so

she simply leans harder in spirit on Him whose bondmaid she is.

This is *His* matter. He will look after it. Her part is simple obedience, as she goes on her natural, accustomed way.

IV

JOSEPH THE FRIEND

AND now as time goes on Joseph becomes troubled. He broods much, sore troubled. Something seems wrong, grievously wrong. The evidence seems unmistakable.

He was a good man, rigid in his sense of right, stern in his sense of duty, having withal a certain kindliness of spirit. He would not make trouble. He would not make matters worse by any open action. But certainly something must be done; so his thoughts ran on. He was sore troubled.

And poor Mary goes quietly on her way. She senses all, though no word may have been spoken. She feels keenly, how keenly no words *can* say. Yet she stays her heart on Him whose bondmaid she is.

This is a bit of that voluntary slavery she had accepted. She would be true. Her Lord knew all. He could be trusted to make things right. He would be trusted to do it in His own time and way.

Do some strains of her "magnificat" sing themselves now that the shadows of the valley are upon her? I think likely, in soft, subdued, sometimes whispered tones.

Then Joseph has a dream. The angel of God comes now to *him*. And he learns Mary's wondrous holy secret.

And, as he wakes, instantly he knows that this is no passing vagary of sleep, but a dream with a meaning, a dream that is a message.

And a great sense of relief blends with a sense of being trusted with a great responsibility. Mary *is* the pure maiden he had thought, and more, so much more than he could have dreamed; she is God's chosen one.

The time is come. The nation's deliver-

ance is at hand. And he is to have a share. He is to do the part a man may do in the great events being worked out; only the incidental part; yet what a privilege to have even that part.

And he accepts gratefully the sacred trust committed to him of being *the friend* of the holy woman through whom God is working out His great plan. Friendship never had holier, sweeter task.

The incident reveals the difficulties—shall I reverently say *God's* difficulties?—in working the plan out in its true human setting; the human difficulties in working out the divine plan.

Naturally the child must be born in technical wedlock. The proper human conventions demand that absolutely. Yet no human conventionalities must be allowed to mar the great plan of the new man coming in a new distinctive way. The whole plan of God for a race centered in that.

Why was Joseph not told earlier? Would

it not have saved Mary much—the word "needless" comes—*needless* pain of spirit? But we remember there is nothing *needless* with God, especially when it concerns pain for any child of His.

Why not? I think simply because he *could* not have taken it in. What had been accepted by Mary would have seemed utterly impossible to him, wholly outside the range of his imagination.

But what troubled him took great hold of him. His whole inner being was stirred. There came a shock. And it worked changes within not otherwise reachable. When that dream came it was to a man strangely wrought upon in his spirit, open now, susceptible.

That was a wondrous morning for Mary, that morning of waking after Joseph's dream. As he came to her home, his face instantly told her of the change in him.

She had *a friend* now in her betrothed. She would have a true understanding friend

in her husband. He had accepted his part of the sacred trust. God had been true.

All this, one glance into Joseph's face told her sensitive spirit. And her heart leaped anew even as when Elizabeth's salutation drew out the wondrous song. But there is a new tenderness of gratitude in this song of her heart, this new unwritten magnificat.

And the arrangements are quickly made, and the betrothal is perfected into marriage. And Joseph begins his holy task, such as man never had before, nor since. The hearth-fire of a new home is kindled, that most sacred of all human altar-fires. That sweet word "home" was never more sweet nor hallowed.

"The wind from out the west is blowing;
The homeward wandering cows are lowing;
Dark grow the pine woods, dark and drear—
The woods that bring the sunset near.

"When o'er wide seas the sun declines,
Far off its fading glory shines,—
Far off, sublime, and full of fear,—
The pine woods bring the sunset near.

" This house that looks to east, to west,
This, dear one, is our home, our rest;
Yonder the stormy sea, and here
The woods that bring the sunset near." [1]

And that word *husband* took on a new fineness of meaning as Joseph became the friend and protector of the woman whom God had chosen to bring to the birth His own Only-begotten.

And the word *friend* was seen in its fine holy meaning in the new peculiar relationship of those holy months. So the days grow on. They grow in a new tender richness to Mary now. This friendship of her husband means much to her.

[1] Richard Watson Gilder.

V

BETHLEHEM THE BIRTHPLACE

BUT now a new difficulty arises. There sifts into this little hill-village from far-away Rome an imperial edict. There is to be a new taxation census taken. Every one must be enrolled. The edict is imperative.

This was most embarrassing. It would necessitate a journey to Bethlehem, the ancestral centre of their family. It would at best be a tedious, slow journey. It came at just the time when Mary would naturally have avoided travel, and longed for the quiet and seclusion of home. This would be the natural first thought to come.

Yet this thought may not have come. For Mary was the kind to think ahead into things in her thoughtful, brooding way. This unusual Son of hers was to sit on the throne of

His father David. And it would be the appropriate thing that He should be born in the city of David, Bethlehem.

And her mind very likely had gone to Micah's word: "Thou Bethlehem, once called Ephratah . . . out of thee shall one come forth . . . to be the ruler in Israel." [1]

But apparently the old home possessions had quite passed out of the family, in the vicissitudes and strange mix-up of the generations. She may have been wondering through those waiting months if indeed this were a part of the wondrous plan.

But how it would work out she could not see probably, and had been content to leave this in her Lord's hands as so many things had been left.

And now very simply and naturally it is all working out. The whole governmental machinery of Rome is set in motion that the way may be made open for the plan to work out fully in every important detail.

[1] Micah v. 2.

And the news that might have seemed embarrassing and troublesome to another brings another quiet singing of her magnificat. Here is another bit of evidence that God is indeed in action. His plan is naturally, simply working out. And everything needful is made to bend and help.

And so the journey is prepared for. The preparations are made thoughtfully and thoroughly, for nothing must be loose or slipshod on the human side. But they are made with a song of praise, while maybe the neighbors wonder a bit over Mary's spirit under what seem like very embarrassing circumstances.

And so the journey is made. By slow and easy stages, probably, they make their way southward to the ancient ancestral seat of their family. And one day they came in sight of the old town lying yonder upon the southern hills surrounded by olive orchards and green fields and fertile lowlands.

They ride in past David's well and on into

the narrow streets of the city. Joseph doubtless longed to take Mary to a home but none is open, and they ask their way to the travellers' inn.

And now another really annoying embarrassment comes. The innkeeper comes out and earnestly assures Joseph in answer to his questions and pleadings that there really is no room at all to be had. The census has brought an unusual number of old Judah people. And the inn is crowded, quite overcrowded.

This is indeed embarrassing. But a great peace fills Mary's heart as she listens to them talking. He who has led will lead. All will be well. Nothing has escaped His eye. It will be as He has arranged. And she would not have it otherwise.

Then the innkeeper suggests that as night is drawing on they might find shelter and rest in one of the outer buildings. They really could be made quite comfortable for a makeshift. And perhaps on the mor-

row something could be arranged in the house.

And so it is arranged. And there Mary rests a bit after her journey, and likely as not there's another soft singing, aye, joyous singing, of her wondrous song.

VI

JESUS THE BABE BORN

AND so there the world's wondrous new babe was born. And Mary wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him tenderly in a little improvised cradle of fresh straw in the manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

And over all broods a wondrous unseen Presence, strengthening, soothing, smoothing, comforting—a wondrous Presence that. And all is still. The world's lights were all out. It lay asleep, doubly asleep, all unsuspecting the world-event of the night. So does the world in its small, self-satisfied wisdom sleep while God's events are taking place.

But the stillness was not for long. The upper world is awake. Heaven is always

bending down in brooding concern over the old earth. This means much to the upper-world folks. The stupidity of earth may shut its eyes to the real things. But heaven's heart is awake and alert.

Just over that softly rounded hill yonder you see a little group of shepherds keeping watch over their flocks. They are asleep or half asleep. But now they are gently startled to see a wondrous glow of soft light about them.

What is this? And they rub their blinking eyes. Not moonlight that, nor starlight; something quite different. And now as their eyes get used a little to this new sort of light they see some one standing like a man, but with a glorious appearance unlike any man they ever saw.

And there came to them that sense of dread that men always seem to feel when a touch of heaven comes. And then this wondrous man of glory speaks quietly:

"*Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you*

good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

"*And this is the sign unto you: ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.*"

And as the shepherds listen with astonished staring eyes and open months, they are startled yet more with a great outburst of rapturous singing. And they see a great company of bright angel beings standing round about this one who has been speaking to them.

It is they who are singing. And the refrain of their song comes clear and distinct on the night air:

"*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*"

And the shepherds listen and look. And the company of angels move up and away singing as they go.

And as quickly as they can recover them-

selves the shepherds hasten in by the nearest road to town, and go inquiring about till at last they come to the inn, and then find the manger and the babe just as the angel had said.

Their coming has aroused the inn, and as the people come crowding out they tell of the happenings of the night, the angel message, and the wonderful singing, and the story of the wondrous light, until the whole town is astir and talking.

And the babe's mother listens. She understands. It fits in perfectly with all she knows. And she broods in her heart over these great things that are come to pass, and sings a bit of her joyous song as she cares for her precious babe.

Meanwhile as the day wore on something was happening over the hills yonder to the north in Jerusalem. Three distinguished looking strangers came riding into the city on their solemn camels. They wear strange garb. Evidently they came from some far

country and are persons of note. They ask their way to the chief of the city and nation.

And their question startles every one: "*Where is He who is born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and are come to do Him homage.*"

And all the city is set agog, from Roman palace to chief priest's palace, and everywhere else. And to the Roman ruler's inquiry the chief priests of the nations point to Bethlehem as the place foretold in their writings.

Thither now these three travelers from a far country turn their steps. And when they find the babe they fall down and do Him homage, and offer rare gifts of the treasured things of their country.

And all the people wonder and talk. And Mary sings again a bit of her holy hymn with a new hush of joy in her heart, as she cares for the creature needs of her holy babe.

VII

"UNTO US," THE NEW HEIR

IS it not a winsome Christmas story? this first one? And as one reads it anew, with the Christmas time drawing near, once again like a refrain of sweet music come the words from out the old pages of Isaiah: "*Unto us a babe is born.*"

Aye, *unto us.* Out from the presence of God, into the sacred womb of a pure virgin, and so into the life of our race, this babe came *unto us.*

He is ours, this babe. He is our heir leading us into all the heritage that is ours by divine gift. He is our link back to God, and forward to the new future, the real life that is ours. Unto us is this new-born babe come.

A babe includes all of both family lines. It is more than either line, for it is all of

both. So in this new-born babe there comes to be a new lineal union.

All of God is in Him. And all there is of man, true man unhurt by the hurt of sin, is in Him. All the real humanity, the purity, the strength, the gentleness, and sympathetic touch that belongs to our humanity, is in Him.

All of our hope lies in Him, the taking possession of the racial heritage lies in this new-born babe, our heir. He is indeed a new-born babe, *the* new-born babe. The newness of purity and strength and of realizing all that is ours comes in this birth.

And how simply and fully and naturally this new-born babe *touches* all our human life. And in touching it how He *enriches* life. He uncovers to us the riches that are there. And He leads to new riches that He puts there for us.

Run through the story again as we have it here, and note the rare humanness of the doorway through which He came.

There is modest *womanhood* with all its winsome fineness of texture. There is gentle *wifehood* with all its sacredness of faithful relation. There is the never ceasing wonder of *motherhood* with its holiest obligations and privileges.

And there is human *friendship* in its highest setting, with all its rarest opportunities. And there the unceasing wonder of all miracles—*babyhood* in the likeness of those begetting the babe.

And there is the one sacred word that sums up all this, the word *home*, with its true atmosphere of pure strong unquestioning *love*.

What a doorway it was through which this new-born babe of God, and of the race, came "unto us."

In Eden God stooped down and breathed upon the dust of the earth, and man came and took on God's image and came to his full life.

In Nazareth-Bethlehem God stooped and

breathed again that creative breath upon a woman, and forth came a new Man, who will yet lead the race into its full life.

Yes, the *shadows* are there. It is a part of life as life actually is. The shadows crept into Eden, and darkened out over all life. They crept into Nazareth and Bethlehem and thickened and darkened over the life of the babe born there till at length the clouds broke in storm.

And then, breaking out through the storm, the new light came. A new-born light came in as the life of this new-born babe at its maturity went out.

And that light shines out over land and sea. And it will shine more and more till the noontide brightness shall yet come to all our earth. For that new-born Man is the world's Saviour, and ours.

Is it not a winsome story, this Christmas story? And, better than winsome, it is true, both in the story of the past, and in the story it holds for the coming days.

But we get its real rare winsomeness only as we let it tell itself out to us in the syllables of life. We may make room within for the new-born Life of Bethlehem and Calvary and the Third Morning. Then we shall know the sweet music of Mary's wondrous song.

And the more room the more life and the more music.

"Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown
When Thou camest to earth for me,
But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room
For Thy holy nativity:
Oh, come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee.

"The foxes found rest and the birds their nest,
In the shade of the forest tree;
But Thy couch was the sod, O Thou Son of God,
In the deserts of Galilee:
Oh, come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee.

"Thou camest, O Lord, with the living word
That should set Thy people free;
But with mocking scorn, and with crown of thorn,
They bore Thee to Calvary:
Oh, come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
Thy cross is my only plea."

EMILY E. S. ELLIOTT.

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